Strengthening Global Health Diplomacy in Canada’s Foreign Policy Architecture: Literature Review and Key Informant Interviews

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Issue & Rationale

• Health has become increasingly important in political affairs
  • Borderless
  • National strategic interest
  • Political priority

• Calls for expertise across health and foreign policy fields
  • Oslo Ministerial Declaration on Global Health and Foreign Policy
  • United Nations General Assembly
What about Canada?

- Examining the Canadian government’s institutional architecture to engage in health issues globally

- Why should Canada engage in global health diplomacy? Are there comparative advantages for Canada?
- Does the Canadian government have the capacity to effectively engage in global health affairs?
- If so, what are tangible strategies for Canada’s long-term engagement in global health diplomatic efforts?
Methods

• Extensive review
  • Academic and grey literature
  • Policies of peer countries

• 12 in-depth key informant interviews
  • High-ranking officials within
    • Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT)
    • Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
    • Health Canada
Comparative Advantages for Canadian Engagement in Global Health Diplomacy

• Comparative advantages exist for Canada
  • Stellar international reputation for domestic health care delivery, education, research
  • Leader of Global Health Security Initiative
  • “Globalization Nation”
  • Extensive diplomatic network

• Can learn from its past and current interventions in global health diplomacy, as well as those of other countries
Comparative Advantages for Canadian Engagement in Global Health Diplomacy

• Engagement requires serious public capacity, political commitment and effective leadership
  • DFAIT
  • CIDA
  • Health Portfolio
    • Health Canada
    • Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)
    • Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR)
Assessment of Canada’s Global Health Diplomacy Architecture

• All key informants believed:
  • Canada was already a strong leader in global health affairs
  • Global health diplomacy would be a strategic area for Canada’s engagement given its comparative advantages

• Need sophisticated framework for political coherence, inter-departmental collaboration and flexible, robust architecture
Challenges

• Leadership
  • Diffused governance, lack of clear vision and mandate
    • DFAIT lacks health expertise
    • Health Portfolio has technical expertise, but limited by domestic mandate
    • CIDA’s diffused governance does not promote collaboration and lacks technical expertise
  • Tension and competition among departments

• Coordination
  • Organizations work in silos
  • Current mechanisms are issue-specific
  • Leading organization unclear
Challenges

• Discordance
  • Structural issues of ownership and autonomy
  • Lack of effective communication across departments

• Political Interface
  • Lacking connection between global health diplomacy and national political leadership
  • Absence of strong political prioritization and direction
  • Discontinuities between domestic and international policies
Strategies

• Prioritizing health in foreign policy
  • Adoption of common vision and action plan
  • Looking to other countries
  • Exchanging expertise across disciplines

• Promoting collaboration across government departments
  • “Rising above silos and thinking big”
  • Coordination mechanisms for non-priority issues
  • Enhancing capacity for work at the health-foreign policy interface

• Engaging key partners and stakeholders
  • Civil society organizations, professional associations, opinion leaders and academic institutions among others
Conclusion & Policy Implications

• Canada is a leader in global health affairs, but much can be improved to strengthen our leadership

• There are tangible ways to improve Canada’s institutional capacity over the long-term
  • Embedding health in foreign affairs
  • Promoting inter-departmental collaboration
  • Engaging key partners and stakeholders

• Additional research
  • Real world impact and cost-effectiveness of strategies
  • Practicality of strategies’ implementation
Thank You

Please email additional questions and/or comments to
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